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# Q&A

## U.S. lags in coping with Soviet apparatus for disinformation

**Roy Godson on Soviet disinformation and propaganda.**

*Roy Godson, director of the National Strategy Information Center and co-author of "Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy," discussed Soviet propaganda and disinformation with Washington Times State Department correspondent Bill Outlaw.*

**Q: What are your observations regarding Soviet disinformation tactics that are being used with regard to the current TWA hostage situation?**

**A:** If we can, I want to call this propaganda and disinformation. It isn't all disinformation. Disinformation would be intentionally false information combined with true information and propaganda which could be the sort of telling the truth as they see it. So I'd actually prefer to call it propaganda and disinformation, rather than just disinformation.

Okay. So, the Soviets are using terrorism in a multi-faceted way of the hijacking crisis. On one hand, the Soviets condemn terrorism and in general condemn hijacking and the seizure of diplomats. That's one level. At the same time they maintain that the cause of terrorism and the main perpetrators of terrorism in the world is — believe it or not — the United States. For example, they maintain that American ships, American military presence, is part of this activity and they call the Delta Force a terrorist organization.

So then on one level they condemn the use of terrorism, maintain that it is the United States that is the main perpetrator. They claim that we are the sponsors of both ultra right-terrorism, that's a right-wing terrorism, as well as ultra left-wing terrorism, such as

the Red Brigades. Right-wing terrorism would be the Gray Wolves that planned the attempted assassination of the pope.

On yet another level, the Soviets actually support national liberation movements, in so-called national liberation movements that engage in terrorism. But activities of national liberation movements, they do not consider to be terrorism. By national liberation movements we're talking about the PLO, the African National Congress, various guerrilla movements that the Soviets are sympathetic with. They provide these national liberation movements with money, guns and diplomatic support.

**Q: What form does their propaganda and/or disinformation take?**

**A:** They use terrorist incidents, such as the hijacking, not just this particular hijacking but others, to weave in some of their current propaganda themes. For example, to maintain that we are using this particular hijacking to denigrate the Greek government. They claim that we are opposed to the Greek government's independent foreign policy and we're criticizing the Greeks, taking advantage of the terrorist incident to criticize the Greeks.

And, on another level, they maintain that we use terrorist incidents, and particularly this specific hijacking incident, to have an excuse to introduce American military presence into this region of the world.

**Q: Have they condemned the killing of an American in the hostage crisis?**

**A:** Almost never have the Soviets condemned anybody who killed an American or seized an American. And to my knowledge there have been no official statements in this case. That, on the contrary, somehow we are

responsible for the hijacking and that we're capitalizing and utilizing it.

**Q: You mean, the campaign is to try to convince everyone that situations such as the hijacking are really the fault of the United States?**

**A:** Exactly. And the Soviets then seize upon the opportunity to discredit the United States, to suggest that we are utilizing this for our own purpose, that we set up terrorism and we utilize it. So far, that's the standard response, and based on this experience in Iran, we shouldn't expect to get any help from them. On the contrary, we'll get this duplicitous "We are against hijacking — we are against the seizure of diplomats, but we aren't going to do anything to help the United States or anyone else who it's not in our interests to help."

And, as I said, the really great thing is to have the documentation. And we have this documentation in the Gromyko-Arafat conversation from the Iranian case.

**Q: This information on propaganda and disinformation of Soviets and their support of other countries in terrorist activities — is this coming from intelligence reports?**

**A:** This comes from studies that have been done about the Soviet activities and also what the Soviets themselves say about what they're doing. So far everything I've said can be found in open Soviet sources.

**Q: Such as, you mean, Tass or Izvestia?**

**A:** Such as studies and publications put out by Soviet so-called think tanks. They actually put out books with these interpretations. And the Soviets have said, since we're talking about support for national liberation movements, they provide money, material,

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diplomatic support — while at the same time, they will not help the Western victims of these terrorist movements.

**Q: Part of the disinformation here that you told me about is not only that they're doing this but obviously that they're doing this through their various media channels?**

A: So far their reaction to the first week of the crisis has been moderately muted. It's taking them a while to decide exactly how to play this crisis. One can see in the Eastern European press and in the Soviet press the long-standing major themes that I just enunciated, but we haven't yet seen the full force of the Soviet propaganda offensive.

The longer the crisis continues, the more time we're allowing them to mobilize their huge propaganda-and-disinformation apparatus, somewhere in the order of 10,000 to 15,000 full-time people in Moscow, and another 10,000 to 15,000 around the world, expending somewhere in the order of \$3 billion to \$4 billion a year. So I'm saying they haven't yet, and it takes a while for them to fully mobilize their apparatus, and they're now in the process of doing that. So the full brunt of Soviet active measures and propaganda and disinformation has yet to be seen. But based on past experience, it will follow these general guidelines.

In the Iranian crisis, for example, this pattern was followed, and although at the United Nations, Moscow was unwilling to support the seizure of hostages — diplomatic personnel — Moscow secretly, we know now from captured Israeli documents, was supporting the Ayatollah Khomeini's policy, the Iranian policy. In 1982 and '83 the Israelis captured minutes of the meeting between [Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei] Gromyko and [PLO leader Yasser] Arafat, and that is the source for this double, this multi-facet or multi-level, policy in which Gromyko states that as a state, we cannot object, that we cannot support the notion of seizing diplomatic personnel, but in terms of our global power relations around the world, we are sympathetic to the Iranians and we will do nothing to help the United States.

**Q: Can we cite some other specific examples of things that either have happened pertaining to the current hostage crisis?**

A: As I said, so far it's been too new and it takes them a while to decide how they're going to play the issue.

**Q: But you have no doubt but that there is a propaganda/disinformation campaign coming pertaining to this?**

A: That's right. They are particularly well-organized in Moscow to either engage in offensive active measures or what they call counter-propaganda, that is to say take advantage of Western actions and respond with a major organized campaign. Unfortunately, we in the West tend not to be as well-organized, both to engage in offensive as well as defensive or counter-propaganda. And we don't put the same kinds of resources into these kinds of active measures in propaganda campaigns.

**Q: It seems another problem obviously would be they have the added advantage of the controlled**

**press, to which they can they dictate what they want to go out, whereas here you can start a propaganda campaign?**

A: Right. The competition in propaganda is in many ways unequal. One of the ways it is unequal is that the Soviet media is completely controlled, whereas the American media is completely uncontrolled. But that is, of course, a disadvantage that we want to live with.

But even when the [United States] government wants to respond, it doesn't have — we, as a society do not — have not applied the same kinds of resources and talent and organization to propaganda that the Soviet system does.

**Q: Are you saying that's an error in the system?**

A: Oh, yes. I definitely think that we should increase the resources, the talent and the coordination in our government. Starting in 1979, in the last years of the Carter administration, we began to see a renaissance of American interest in the subject. And there has been a steady but slow growth in our capabilities. I mean a slow but steady growth in this area. However, I think there is still a long way to go before we can deal with the huge Soviet active measures effort, and neutralize it.

**Q: What kinds of things — let's go back to the Iranian situation — do you recall that the Soviets used there?**

A: I must admit I don't recall. And I never studied it as a propa-

ganda campaign. The only thing was . . . the specific document where we had the Soviets describing how they were using the Iranian crisis to support their overall objectives and collaborating with the PLO and the Iranians in this. And how they wouldn't condemn the hostage-taking.

**Q: The portrayal of the United States as the terrorist, is that a consistent theme in their propaganda?**

A: That's right. They maintain that terrorism that exists is U.S.-fostered and we use terrorism as a method of increasing U.S. control throughout the world. This policy of supporting terrorism — this policy they claim of our supporting terrorism — has its origin prior to the Reagan administration, but the Reagan administration accentuated the use of this instrument, that is the Reagan administration has been particularly interested in utilizing terrorism to further its objectives. And, as I said, they explain all terrorism and they call almost all American behavior of a violent nature terroristic; the invasion of Grenada, the Delta Force.

**Q: Also I guess a target of theirs would be Israel and, of course, U.S. support of Israel?**

A: Yes, okay, this is where they weave in and they apply, they sort of suggest, that all American regional activity is designed to support all that involved the use of violence [and] is coordinated. And that particularly any Israeli action is coordinated with the United States. And therefore, they maintain, it is not surprising that the Shi'ites in Lebanon link the United States with the Israelis.

**Q: Is there any direct evidence that would indicate anything about the Shi'ites getting any sort of assistance, training or anything like that from either the Soviet Union or any of its surrogates?**

A: On a recent trip to Europe, I was told by knowledgeable European sources that Amal had received some assistance and training from the Soviet Union.

**Q: In anticipation of some sort of campaign from the Soviet Union, is there some way the United States can try to cut off any type of propaganda/disinformation campaign, nip it in the bud, so to speak?**

A: I think one thing we could do would be to anticipate major Soviet active measures, themes and campaigns. I believe it is possible to do that. Indeed, we at the

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National Strategic Information Center plan to issue, to start to issue, reports that would anticipate, rather than react to. All too often in the past we have engaged in what could be called end-trail analysis, and it's not meant to be a pun. But we examine the results of Soviet active measures and wring our hands and sometimes react and try to design some counter to that. But I think one can also anticipate, and by anticipating, by being forewarned, we can be forearmed and plan to be able to neutralize this at a much earlier stage.

I think also that we have begun to support democratic forces throughout the world much more in recent years. I think we can do much more. I think the Reagan initiative, the speech in Parliament, the National Endowment for Democracy Initiative that began a year or two ago, is the beginning of an effort that has to be developed and refined as we gain more experience in this area.